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ABSTRACT

The writing of academic abstracts is more than a tiresome necessity of scholarly life. It is a practice which goes beyond genre and technique to questions of identity and the promotional economies of academic work. In this paper, a series of abstracts from a variety of refereed journals and conferences are deconstructed and a set of questions that allow individuals to "read" the representation of data, argument, methodology, and significance are developed. According to the paper, to begin to make sense of abstract writing, a selection of different educational journals were surveyed and a rubric was constructed to use to read each item; a second foray into journal abstracts allowed researchers to read for depth rather than breadth and in publications across three countries. The paper shows three abstracts to illustrate the problem of writing anticipatory texts that overpromise, particularly when they are based on research that is hardly yet begun. It argues that the rules of abstract engagement are fluid and increasingly important with the advent of online journals and global citation indices. The paper suggests that abstract art is now an obligatory aspect of postgraduate supervision. It further suggests that the writing of abstracts is neglected in the academy and that there is benefit in being more systematic about supporting postgraduate and newly qualified researchers in writing abstracts. An appendix offers questions that encourage writers to engage with the text work and identity work involved in writing an abstract. (Author/NKA)

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2A

Abstract art

or

The politics and pedagogies of getting read

AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION FOR RESEARCH IN EDUCATION

ANNUAL CONFERENCE. BRISBANE. DECEMBER 1-4, 2002-11-27

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The writing of academic abstracts is more than a tiresome necessity of scholarly life. It is a practice which goes beyond genre and technique to questions of identity and the promotional economies of academic work. In this paper we deconstruct a series of abstracts from a variety of refereed journals and conferences and develop a set of questions that allow us to 'read' the representation of data, argument, methodology and significance. We argue that the rules of abstract engagement are fluid and increasingly important with the advent of online journals and global citation indices. We suggest that abstract art is now an obligatory aspect of postgraduate supervision.

Although abstracts are produced for different purposes, they have become more significant pieces of writing. There are now, we suggest, good reasons for postgraduate students to learn the scholarly art of writing abstracts.

Journal abstracts are written as a means of presenting a succinct snapshot of a piece of scholarly work. However, they are also partial representations of the academic herself who is known for/by her corpus of writings. Writing an abstract is thus a kind of identity work. But this texting of scholarship does not stop with the writing. Readers of abstracts read to find pieces of work which they can re-fashion inter-textually into new scholarly re-presentations. There is thus much invested in the both the writing and reading of abstracts.

In recent times, as the number of academic journals have proliferated, many have simultaneously gone online. Academic literature searches have transmogrified into digital flaneurie in a small number of enormous journal malls in which the collective products of scholarship are on show. And in these scholastics bazaars the strolling academic, like Benjamin's Baudelaire, is

> a social figure intimately associated with the commodity form, indeed who circulates like a commodity himself (sic) and who, in seeking a marketplace for his literary productions, goes in search of the magical field of commodity circulation

These gigantic data-bases, through which the commodity-consumer scholar roams, use titles, keywords and abstracts as both filters and layers. Their general format is one in which an article title appears first, either in a list of contents produced for browsing, or as the result of a search. One click on the title reveals the abstract. Like goods on display in boutiques and arcades, titles and abstracts either encourage passers-by to come inside, to look further, to purchase - or not. In these commercial environments, abstracts must thus be at once tantalising enough to produce desire, while also being sufficiently robust and sophisticated to offer the promise of meaty

scholarship in the full account. The messages in these digitised promotions must say - Read me now, I have something to say that is new, interesting, you cannot do without it.

Not all abstracts are written as seductive bids for the readers' credit card, time and Endnote. Some are produced as bids for recognition and inclusion. These are the abstracts written for conferences such as this. Such abstracts must convince those on selection committees that the proposed paper and its writers have something to contribute that others will find of interest, something that potentially makes a contribution to the field.

Many of these abstracts are written from stable footings based in research that is well underway, if not completed. This is the pattern, for example, with many science/technology conferences where the emphasis is on reporting the findings of completed research. It is also the case where full papers are submitted for refereeing before the conference, as is the case for some papers at AARE this year.

Some abstracts, however, are more a statement of intent. This may be more the case with social sciences conferences - in our experience, it is certainly true for education. In good faith, an abstract is produced well ahead of time for a conference. Perhaps the research is yet to be done, perhaps it is underway. Despite not knowing the findings of an investigation, a cogent and convincing abstract must be produced in order to make the conference cut. This abstract is thus a kind of best guess of what might be the findings, what might be of interest and import.

But if the trajectory of the research has not been as predicted, when it is time to deliver on an accepted abstract, there are two alternatives - to write something that is different from the printed abstract or to try to fulfil the original remit. Many have had the experience of coming to a conference session only to be told by the presenter that the promised paper is not to be delivered. Some kind of substitute is offered. Some of us may well have had the experience of having to skew our research process in order to deliver something like a promised paper. This is when abstracts become productive of research. Many here will, we are sure, resonate with our confessional tale of the changing abstract.

Great expectations: the anticipatory abstract

We now show three abstracts to illustrate the problem of writing anticipatory texts that over-promise, particularly when they are based on research that is hardly yet begun. This trio of texts illustrate how bids for inclusion shift and become more robust as the research is actually done. And, although we talk in this example of a research team and 'they' who produced these abstracts, it is important to know that they were written by one of us as part of a collaborative research project.

The first abstract is a conference bid. The content of the paper was flagged in a publishing plan submitted as part of an ARC funding application early in 2001. Somewhat presumptuously, but in line with the performative outcomes now expected of researchers, the applicants indicated that there would be a symposium at AARE on the research at the end of the first year. The actual abstract was written in February 2002 when there was a Research Associate on board, but little

else. None of the relevant Ethics approvals had been submitted and the research team had just begun to think about what a literature review might encompass and how it might be organised.

Nevertheless, the researchers were confident of providing not one, but three, conference papers.

THE CONFERENCE BID

The principal-ship as extreme sport?

Both anecdotal and research evidence suggests that principals' work is now more risky, arduous and time consuming than ever before. In particular, gendered, raced and classed relations continue to be an ongoing and debilitating feature of the practice of principalship. Work in both Australia and overseas (including our own) points to the combined effects of New Public Management and neo-liberalism, which appears in the school office as: significant increases in managerial tasks to the detriment of the educational; growing surveillance through audit and media; and conflicts between local needs and priorities and externally imposed requirements. We read this literature against the grain, looking for the evidence that the job may still be worth doing.

This paper is intended to be critical of literature not yet read. However, most of this abstract dwells on the context of the research. It is apparent that the writers have no idea at all about what the specific literature might say. They say they are going to read against the grain, but fail to say what that reading might produce. The strangled and over complex sentences about principals' work in this abstract are suggestive of the blurring and fudging going on around what the actual paper might really be about. Of course, the writers do have some general notions drawn from previous work and from the texts used to argue for the grant. Here, however, there is no argument here beyond there being little positive in the literatures about principals' work. This is actually incorrect and they should have known better. They did, and this mistake was remedied in the next iteration of the abstract.

AARE accepted the bid for inclusion.

Then an opportunity to publish was offered. Some time in June 2002 the researchers were asked to submit a paper to a special issue of a refereed journal which was to address the broad topic of principals' work and shortages of applications. By this time they did have some literature in hand and were expecting to have a set of policy documents from all Australian state and Catholic systems within a few weeks. The journal abstract produced for this inclusion bid bore some relation to the conference abstract written first, and it did have a basis in a beginning analysis of texts. However, it is still highly anticipatory.

THE JOURNAL BID

Heart attacks, revolting teachers and domestic disarray: popular representations of the crisis in principal supply

According to the print media in Australia, the United States, Canada and England it is little wonder that school principals are in short supply. The job it seems now literally consumes administrators and frightens off teachers who might otherwise aspire to the position. This surprisingly consistent story is often juxtaposed with a picture of an exemplary principal who balances increased paperwork with time for children and their families. But this representation contrasts starkly with official policy texts which portray principals as cool rational managers meeting a bevy of requirements with enhanced autonomy and flexibility. In this article we analyse these contrasting representations using a corpus of newspaper articles and a collection of systemic policy documents. We then consider how writings from principals' associations confront the rational technical principal created in policy texts, but in so doing, create a contradictory discourse of the overworked and stressed principal victim and the humanist caring sharing hero(ine).

The title here is now quite different, and is based on actual newspaper headlines. The focus has moved to representations rather than being simply a critical reading of literature.

The abstract suggests that there will be three kinds of texts analysed - media reports, policy texts and principals association writings. At this time the team had read some media reports and principal association writings and had a small folder of policy texts which they hoped would quickly grow to a filing cabinet drawer. They ambitiously committed to using these multiple sets of documents rather than playing safe and using what they had already. And because they did not actually have all of this data and hadn't completed the analysis of what was in hand, there is a proliferation of examples and a marginalization of the argument thread in the middle of the abstract. The writers suggest that there is a dominant picture of harried principals in media texts, contrasted with an exemplary caring and sharing principal. They then go on to talk about the kinds of representations found in policy texts before specifying the data used and then move back into another representation found in principals association documents, asserting that these contradictory pictures will be compared. They do not hint at the results of this comparison. A quasi-conclusion to the argument is thus made - it is not clear how the texts lead through to this position.

By the time the research team received a reminder from the journal editor that the article was nearly overdue, more policy texts had arrived: there was nowhere near a filing cabinet drawer, instead there were three full folders and a matrix of what was missing. The journal abstract would have to be modified to meet this more limited data set.

However, as the team began to work on the draft of the article, using both media reports and principals association writings, it quickly become clear that if both kinds of texts were included then the article would be too long. In addition, once the move from three data sets to only two was made, there was a danger of setting up a kind of good/true media representations versus bad policy representations. The researchers decided, therefore, that the article would only focus on media reports and that it would serve to orient their research.

After the article was written and it had been amended by all the research partners, the following journal abstract was produced.

THE ACTUAL JOURNAL ARTICLE (before refereeing)

High stakes principalship - sleepless nights, heart attacks and sudden death accountabilities: Reading media representations of the US principal shortage

The possible shortage of applicants for principal positions is news in Australia and abroad. We subject a corpus of predominantly US news articles to deconstructive narrative analysis and find that the dominant media representation of principals' work is one of long hours, low salary, high stress and sudden death from high stakes accountabilities. However reported US policy interventions focus predominantly on professional development for aspirants. We note that this will be insufficient to reverse the lack of applications, and suggest that the dominant media picture of completely unattractive principals' work, meant to leverage a policy solution, will perhaps paradoxically perpetuate the problem. This picture is also curiously at odds with research that reports high job satisfaction among principals. We suggest that there is a dominant binary of victim and saviour principal in both media and policy which prevents some strategic re-thinking about how the principalship might be different.

In this version, which still needs refinement, the title has changed again. Here the words in the title refer - not to issues derived from a first reading of newspaper articles - but to categories drawn from the textual analysis. Where in the journal bid the researchers highlighted the public/private work tensions and the behaviour of teachers, here the notion of accountability is emphasised. A methodological approach and the corpus of data are specified. The argument now highlights multiple issues arising from the analysis, is more specific about the nature of the discursive binary constructed about principals' work and stakes a claim for doing otherwise. However, there is a tendency in this abstract to try to both argue and summarise the paper simultaneously and a further reworking is required in order to sharpen the prose so that the argument is more crisply constructed.

Having completed an analysis and written an article, the problem of what to do with the AARE conference paper was settled - the research team would present the journal article which still bore some connection to the original abstract, hoping that their audience would not be too disappointed.

These examples indicate how an anticipatory abstract changes as research is completed. This movement from idea to realisation points to the fluidity of the abstract. The abstract is not one thing, a fixed form, a set piece with transparent characteristics easily identified and tabulated. However, despite this pliancy, our re-search here is aimed at invetsigating patterns in the abstract form.

Abstract reading: methodology

To begin to make sense of abstract writing, we firstly surveyed a selection of different educational journals. We assumed that publications that served different research interests might provide us with some abstract disciplinary conventions. We were not interested in making an exhaustive trawl of texts, but rather to go for a selection that might yield some indication of

commonalities of form.

We focussed on the first issue of ten journals published in 2001. Finding some cogent selection criteria was difficult, so in the end we went to journals subscribed to by the University of South Australia available on one online data-base. We chose a selection of ten whose titles began with the words "Journal of..." These covered a range of topics and were produced by five different and large publishing companies, Lawrence Erlbaum, Sage, Blackwell, Kluwer and Taylor and Francis. In addition we also looked at one on line journal whose abstracts we knew to be different from the norm.

The journals we examined were:

Journal of Contemporary Psychology (8 articles)

Journal of Art and Design (11 articles)

Journal of Early Childhood Literacy (4 articles)

Journal of Education and Work (7 articles)

Journal of Curriculum Studies (6 articles)

Journal of Philosophy of Education (11 articles)

Journal of Moral Education (5 articles)

Journal of Education Policy (5 articles)

Journal of Youth Studies (6 articles)

Journal of Phonetics (4 articles)

Harvard Educational Review (3 articles)

There were a total of 70 abstracts.

We then constructed a rubric that we used to read each article. These were:

- the first line of each abstract.

  We wondered if there might be formulae that were associated with particular disciplines or whether there were more general conventions. We wanted to get an impression of whether the research was contextualised in some way at the outset and whether the writers had worked for some kind of attention grabbing opener - in other words how writerly they had

been.

- whether the abstract was a summary report or an argument or some kind of blend

  We were mindful of some written material we had seen describing abstracts as succinct summaries of the research - in other words, descriptive pieces.

- the format of the abstract

  In particular, we looked in the first instance for what, who and how; and hypothesis, method and findings. We hoped here to get a sense of what writers thought needed to go into an abstract

- what epistemological position was apparent

  We were looking to see if there was any connection between the type of research and format and the epistemological tradition

- how the researcher was represented in the text (or not)

  We wondered whether there were any patterns here in discipline and epistemology and the presence of absence of the researcher(s)

For our second foray into journal abstracts we read for depth rather than breadth. We selected four educational research journals published by research organisations across three countries: *Australian Educational Researcher* (Australia), *Educational Researcher* and the *American Educational Research Journal* (US) and the *British Educational Research Journal*. In our analysis we aimed to identify the style/approach/genre used in these journals specifically dedicated to general educational research. We also wanted to read across cultures and communities of educational research practice to see what kind (if any) patterning occurred in these abstracts. For consistency of selection criteria, we sampled only volumes published in 2001, focusing on at least two issues from each, as follows:

Australian Educational Researcher vol 28 (1,2,3) (18 articles)

Educational Researcher vol 30 (1,2,3,4,6, 7,9) (7 articles)

American Educational Research Journal vol 38 (1,4) (13 articles)

British Educational Research Journal vol 27(2,4) (13 articles)

There were a total of 51 abstracts.

The decision to sample two journals from the American Educational Research Association

relates to their very different purposes. The stated purpose of the *AERJ* is to publish original empirical and theoretical studies and analyses in education from a wide variety of academic disciplines and substantive fields. They ask for contributions that are significant to the understanding and/or improvement of educational processes and outcomes (broader significance is considered by editors - but is not the key focus).

The *ER* is a thinner, magazine-like journal that goes to all members as part of membership and only features 1-3 research articles at the very front, with the rest devoted to columns, commentary, conference information, book reviews, etc. Directives to those who wish to submit emphasise a broader readership. They ask for scholarly articles of general significance to the educational research community from a wide range of disciplines - articles that report, synthesize or analyse scholarly inquiry - that foreground interpretation, implications and significance of research in education or examine developments important to the field of educational research. Given these different purposes, we expected to see different kinds of locating strategies in the abstracts, depending on how much emphasis writers placed on the broader educational significance of their work, a matter we will return to shortly.

Our rubric for reading abstracts across these four journals shared common ground with those used for our wider scoping, namely:

- the first line of each abstract.
- whether the abstract was a summary report or an argument or some kind of blend
- how the researcher was represented in the text (or not)

Additionally, we looked more closely at the language used and the strategies for arguing, for asserting authority. At a linguistic level, we were interested in verbs -in the use of active vs passive voice and the occurrence or absence of the verb *argue* or its equivalent; we were interested in attitudinal or evaluative items, in particular how an abstract presented its own contribution or its location in relation to other research, issues, debates, etc. By looking in this finer grained way we wanted to see how writers stressed (or did not stress) the significance of the article or research being reported on. Such concerns relate to our pedagogical aims and our concluding argument that postgraduate and early career researchers need models and support for developing the scholarly abstract art.

Disciplinary distinctions

Our scan of the first set of journal abstracts did show some patterns, but not as many as we had expected.

Articles in the *Journal of Contemporary Psychology* were, with only one exception, in the experimental tradition. They worked from what appeared to be a positivist epistemology, speaking of findings as if they were truths. The abstracts were uniformly summary reports which discussed what, how and findings, and were written in the third person. Only two abstracts were contextualised in any way - one was located in a particular trajectory in the field, and the other, an evaluative review of literature, referred to a school and the need for the research. All other

nine abstracts operated in a kind of placeless, timeless vacuum. The same pattern was apparent in the *Journal of Phonetics* which also reported on experiments.

In contrast, and hardly surprisingly, given the focus of the journal, the *Journal of Education Policy* abstracts were highly contextualised in place, time and policy trends. The abstracts were uniformly arguments, although in the lead article the abstract spent so much time setting the scene that there was only a concluding sentence devoted to the actual point the writers wanted to make. All the articles were written from a critical, feminist or post-structural position, or some combination thereof. The researcher was mostly absent in these abstracts, although there was one reference to a collective of authors and another to a generic we-who-must-be-concerned.

The *Journal of Philosophy of Education* abstracts also showed a distinctive pattern. Without exception, the abstracts either began with a proposition and an argument, or with an assertion of an argument which was then elaborated. The researcher was present in six of the eleven abstracts as 'I argue, I address, and I show.' All of the articles were written in critical or hermeneutic traditions, and one used language associated with post-structuralism.

The commonalities in each of these cases suggest both disciplinary coherence and editorial policy. Readers of these journals (the niche market in the mall) could perhaps be expected to accept these writerly and epistemological stances. It is important to note, however, that even within this coherence, there was still marked variation in the first sentences - a point we return to later.

The *Harvard Education Review* abstracts also had some consistency, but these were produced from the house-style. As instructed by the editors, the abstracts were much longer. The authors of each article were written by name - XYZ do this - and in the second person - he argues, they contend... Inside this convention, the abstract written *about* the article rather than an abstract *of* the article, there was no further pattern.

There was little discernable pattern in our other six journals. The abstracts were predominantly arguments with a minority of summary reports and descriptions. The majority of the abstracts were written in the third person, and not one was what we would describe as a riveting read.

There was however one other commonality.

This paper

One particular first sentence construction was used in several of the journals. It goes something like "This paper aims to", "The purpose of this article is to...", " Using this method or data base, this article will..." "This study aims to...", "This paper outlines...", "This paper defines and discusses..." "This article reports...". There were fifteen such instances of this construction. Of these, six were arguments, and nine were summary reports. There were also two abstracts that began " This article is ..." and then referred to theoretical debate, and one which referred to a material employment situation. We think that these latter two are different from those abstracts which begin by stating what the article will accomplish and/or its point. The benefit of this

aim/purpose approach are that the reader knows at the outset what to expect and sometimes why the writers think it is important. But knowing what you are going to get is not necessarily an enticement to read further... in our sample, one such starter stated matter of factly "This article is in three parts".

We suspect that other ways of beginning might not only be more attention getting but might also economically contextualise the research at the same time. We come back to this point in our second set of data.

DIY abstract

We completed our first pass through abstract data by looking at the instructions given as advice to authors. What help we wondered was offered to academics and postgraduates to guide their composition? What we saw surprised us.

Harvard Educational Review: Authors must submit three copies of the manuscript, including a one-page abstract.

Journal of Curriculum Studies: Abstracts are required for all papers submitted and should precede the text of a paper. The length should be approximately 150 words.

Journal of Education and Work: An abstract of 100-150 words should be included

Journal of Youth Studies: Each article should be accompanied by an abstract/summary of 100-150 words on a separate sheet.

Journal of Philosophy of Education: Contributors should include on a separate sheet a summary of 100 words or less, containing key words and phrases that could be used to index the article.

Journal of Moral Education: Each article should be accompanied by an abstract of about 150 words typed on a separate sheet.

Journal of Contemporary Psychology: The abstract must be a single paragraph that summarizes the main findings of the paper in less than 150 words. After the abstract a list of up to 10 key words that will be useful for indexing or searching should be included.

Journal of Education Policy: Abstracts of around 100 - 200 words are required for all papers submitted and should precede the text of a paper.

Journal of Early Childhood Literacy: No instructions

Journal of Art and Design: An abstract of 150 - 200 words should be submitted.

The only journal in our set to deviate from a preoccupation with the length of the abstract, separate sheets of paper intended to facilitate blind reviewing and keywords for searching was

the *Journal of Phonetics* which said

> .Only include in the abstract what you regard as the essentials of your article. Avoid the use of references in the abstract.

We were a little alarmed by this consistent lack of guidance for writers. Abstracts appear to be something that one just knows how to do. For the postgraduate student this is truly a case of secret academic business. Abstract art is just acquired, perhaps osmotically during an apprenticeship with dedicated abstract-ed flaneurs.

Informed by this analysis, we read our second set of journal abstracts more closely (as outlined earlier) to determine any further pattern or set of criteria. We were still searching for anything that might help demystify the abstract genre for postgraduate students so that they might write attention-getting abstracts.

And some interesting issues did emerge from our more focussed reading of the national educational research journals.

The presence/absence of the active/passive researcher

For the most part, the researcher as an identified person (I) or persons (we) was absent from the abstracts of all four journals. Out of 51 abstracts, 5 used I, 9 used we and the 37 others used neither, as follows:

	I	we	neither
AER	2	3	13
ER & AEJR	3	5	13
BERJ	0	1	12

In the absence of the personal pronoun, *this paper, this article* was predominant.

In this way all agency was attributed to the research or the article or the paper rather than the researcher, for example:

This article focuses on secondary school departments and argues that the current approaches to school improvement do not adequately reflect or incorporate the department level. Drawing upon empirical evidence from two evaluative studies, the **article highlights** the processes that contribute to improved departmental performance and subsequently, to school and classroom improvement. **The article concludes** by suggesting that the department is an important 'missing link' in school improvement theory and practice.

While the majority of abstracts do not foreground the researcher - either as I or we - when they do, we is more common. I , in fact is rare. Here is ONE EXCEPTION where the researcher self is made more prominent than anything else (from AER, written by an American researcher). This is the most I centred text of the 51 reviewed.

Participatory research methods are often assumed to alter the roles, relationships and responsibilities of researchers and participants in research projects reframing research as collaborative inquiry. In **my own** research on urban schooling, whenever possible, **I** have attempted to craft research projects with and for the participants in the project, rather than conducting research on them. For instance, in order to document urban adolescents' perspectives on their schooling, **I** asked high school students to join research projects as co-researchers. **I** learned that the core principles of participatory research become complicated and, at times, problematic when put into practice with adolescents. In this article, **I** describe three of the collaborative relationships **I** developed with high school students in a single research project. **I** use this work with adolescents to call for the reconsideration of conventional notions of collaboration, participation, action and representation in participatory research

While the abstract begins by locating itself in the context of a larger discussion about research methods, the excessive use of **I** has a number of effects - it certainly makes clear what the researcher has done - but it also creates a small arena of self location or self promotion. The omissions in this text seem more obvious. What about any other research that has treated research participants as co-researchers? Surely this is not the first. While reference to its own contribution is modest linguistically [*call for the reconsideration of conventional notions of....*] the abstract constructs a world where this is the only or major effort at collaboration.

A second pattern involved the use of the passive - which was most dominant in the *British Educational Research Journal*.

A new theory of school effectiveness and improvement **is outlined**, based on the master concepts of intellectual capital, social capital and leverage, linked with the conventional concept of institutional outputs. Each master concept **is defined** in terms of two subsidiary concepts. Twelve specifically educational concepts are set within this framework to provide the theory. It **is proposed** that, through a simplified model, the range and fertility of the theory **can be exemplified and tested** in three specific cases-the changing nature of school effectiveness and improvement in knowledge economies, citizenship education and teacher effectiveness.

Whether or not such syntactic differences can be attributed to cultural differences is arguable (especially from such a small sample), but we did note an interesting tendency reading across the journals of the US, Australia and the UK.

Location, location, location

We found a greater tendency in the Australian abstracts (6 instances) and British abstracts (4 instances) to name their research by nation in the first sentence, for example:

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This paper investigates the ways in which corporate ideas are impacting on **Australian** education, with a particular emphasis on secondary schools.

The education systems in the States and territories **of Australia** are analysed using age by grade (Year) tables produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics from the 1 July returns from government and non-government schools

The article reviews ways in which performance data are currently used within the **England and Wales** education system.

The analysis demonstrates that the average A/AS level results secured by **English** institutions from year to year are very stable.

While such naming occurs in the American journals (2 instances), geography is less frequently foregrounded. When it does appear it is in relation to research on race rather than to the US as a site or specific location of research.

The race question that appears perhaps most in **American** achievement talk ("how and why do different 'race groups' achieve differently") is also our most often deleted race question, as it provokes our most difficult explanations.

Researchers depict **African American** Teachers in the South during segregation alternately as either victims of oppressive circumstances or as caring role models

That educational researchers outside the USA locate themselves in this way may be a representation of centre-periphery knowledge production. This is a matter for further investigation, but we are now certainly intrigued by this initial glimpse of a possible academic cartography.

We also muse about the other kinds of locational work that go on in abstracts, particularly in first lines. Consider these examples from the ER.

What could it mean for educators within the 'core disciplines' to teach in ways that challenge multiple forms of oppression?

The National Research Council seeks to obtain considerable federal funding for its proposal to improve student learning through its Strategic Education Research Program

Here these first opening lines in the abstract are both relatively engaging but also do location work. They position the article and its writer(s)within a field, a debate, a dilemma, a policy shift... Interestingly, in our second data set most of these locational first liners happened in ER where the remit to authors is to write articles of broad educational and social significance for a wide audience.

We ask ourselves - given that researchers do not work alone and are part of a larger global

research community where conversations and debates within and across disciplines and fields is the norm - shouldn't *all* researchers be doing this locating work, not just those on the margins or those in policy contexts? We wonder if it might not be a good idea for postgraduate students to be encouraged to adopt this kind of approach to the abstract rather than use *This paper This article* as an opening line.

We were interested to find that Educati*on*-line, an English data base of predominantly conference papers, gives more detailed abstract guidance that highlights this very point (see http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/abstracts.html). Taken from a British Educational Research Association publication , the online advice says 'because of the international nature of research it is worth making clear in what country the research took place'. The advice goes on to say that the abstract should specify the claim to knowledge that the writers are making, should indicate the boundaries of space and time within which the enquiry occurred, and hint at the method of enquiry. We were encouraged to read that the abstract is not a 'trailer' or an 'introduction', and that 'both the abstract and the paper should make sense without the other'. This advice we think is beginning to head towards some of the ideas that might underpin a pedagogy for artful abstracts.

To explore further the idea of a postgraduate pedagogy for writing abstracts, we turn to our final example.

Abstracts as text work and identity work

Earlier we argued that writing an abstract can also be viewed as identity work, a way of representing the academic herself as well as her work. Like most academic writing, abstract writing is strongly tied to the formation and negotiation of a scholarly identity.

As abstract writers, we are not only seducing others to buy our wares or bidding for inclusion, we are positioning ourselves as legitimate knowers and text producers within particular scholarly and institutional communities . We locate ourselves by virtue of the literature we note, the theorisations we mobilise and the places we call our ontological/epistemological homes The writing we do, however, this text work, is not neutral; it is shaped by the genres and power relations of the academy and in turn it shapes us - the 'academics' we become and how we are read by others.

We have argued elsewhere that most doctoral and research writing operates on an instrumentalist, skill-based notions of writing that 'glosses over the profoundly textual nature of research' and pays too little attention to the kinds of persons formed through research writing. We remedy that tendency here by considering abstract writing as both text work and identity work - as a bid for finding an authoritative speaking position, which is not necessarily easy work. To illustrate something of what is at stake, we analyse three abstracts that have been written by an early career researcher who has just completed her PhD. The purpose of this abstract is to bid for journal inclusion and what we see here are three progressive drafts of the abstract until it reaches its final form.

We first need to say a bit about the context in which these abstracts were written. While we have

referred to the writer as an 'early career researcher, a familiar identity label within competitive ARC grant writing and bidding, it is a strange appellation in Australian Faculties of Education, where many early career academics have in fact carried out successful professional careers in education for 10-15 years before they embark on mid-career doctoral work. In this sense, they are more mid than early career. While they are not novices, they are positioned as beginners with regard to accessing the journal, conference and other discourse communities of the academy. They have been discursively positioned for 3-8 years as learners. They have been examined (successfully) by 2- 3 other experts in the field and are recently, institutionally authorised as knowledgeable. Through years of writing, they have been duly indoctrinated into the cautious, careful, over-substantiated thesis genre. They are, in short, accomplished in taking up a deferential (and not always confident) academic speaking position.

The identity work for such writers is complex and presents a new set of challenges as they negotiate a place for themselves by publishing out of their PhDs. One of us has been working with these writers in the University context and developing a pedagogy for post-PhD writing and publication. Writing and revising abstracts has been one of the strategies used to support these writers and we call on that experience in our discussion here. In relation to the argument we have been developing in this paper regarding the multiple purposes that abstracts serve, these abstracts can be understood as both a textual bid for journal inclusion as well as a struggle to be(come) authoritative.

The article itself went through a number of revisions with the mentor and the first abstract was written at the end of that process, after the writer was reasonably clear about her purpose and focus.

Draft 1

In this paper I argue that careful analysis of very young children's use of ICT and other technologies suggests that both the dominance of print in emergent literacy education, and school expectations of the literacy achievements of children prior to formal schooling, may require review.

There are a few things we can immediately say about this text. It is short and consists of one sentence. While our earlier analysis showed that abstracts in education journals typically consist of 2-9 sentences, here there is one. The personal pronoun *I* is used as is the verb *argue*, but this does not construct a strong argument. In fact, it is not clear what the argument is or indeed if this is an argument, despite the use of the word 'argue.' The modalised use of 'may review' is understandably cautious but it is not quite clear what it is that might need reviewing. Our analysis of previous abstracts makes the omissions more obvious. There is no locating in relation to anything else - a social or educational issue, previous research, anything, really. And there is no reference to the fact that this is about research - strangely, the term research is omitted, entirely.

The pedagogy for working with such abstracts has been to treat them as provisional, as clay in need of some massaging and manipulating. Discussion between mentor and writer centres on the

genre of abstract writing, on the need to locate the research, on asserting an authoritative position. Sometimes the abstract is marked with suggestions, sometimes other alternatives are modelled, sometimes there is joint writing on the computer to jointly construct a different discursive stance. The text work is hands on and the writer frames another abstract.

Here is a second draft.

Draft 2

In this paper I explore how three young boys in the period of pre-school transition use ICT and other technologies. I suggest that neither the dominance of print in emergent literacy education, nor school expectations of the literacy achievements of children prior to formal schooling, attend to the versatility with literacy technologies demonstrated by these very young children and that this failure could inhibit their continuing literacy development both in ICTs and print.

This abstract has now expanded to two sentences. *I* is still foregrounded but the verbs *explore* and *suggest* now replace the earlier us eof *argue*. Nonetheless, there is a stronger sense of argument emerging here. While the 3 boys are not named as research subjects in a research project, they are now more visible as part of a data set. The neither/ nor framing creates a more authoritative and critical stance towards literacy education than was evident in the first draft. And an implicit contrast is being made between what children can do and what school offers. There is still no location work, however, being attempted, although this finally emerges in draft 3.

Draft 3

Recent investigations of early and emergent literacy seriously underestimate young children's capacity to use ICTs and other technologies in becoming literate, and print continues to be privileged as *the* dominant literacy for young children. In this paper I examine how three young boys used ICT in the period of pre-school transition and highlight the complexity of their multimodal reading and writing practices. I argue that unless schools attend to young children's versatility with literacy technologies, this failure could inhibit their continuing literacy development both in ICTs and print.

Draft 3 is more elaborated again in terms of sentences (3) and words (from 45 to 73 to 94 here in the third draft). The three sentences seem to correspond with three rhetorical moves. The first sentence locates the paper in relation to a body of research on early and emergent literacy and takes a strong evaluative stance on that work through the verb phrase *seriously underestimate* and *continues to be privileged*. The second sentence identifies the same data as draft 2 (the three young boys) but a purpose for looking at them is now foregrounded (*highlight the complexity*). The strength of the assertions have clearly increased from previous drafts and in sentence 3 an explicit argument is also made, with strong evaluative terms being used (unless, failure, could inhibit). This is, we would argue, a far more successful abstract than the first in that it creates a more engaging bid for inclusion and a more authoritative speaking position for the writer.

The revising of this abstract, however, was not easy. It took time (three weeks of passing the abstract back and forth) and considerable scaffolding to achieve. We have observed a similar need for guidance and support with our graduate students as well as other post-PhD writers. We have, in fact, been somewhat surprised at the difficulty our colleagues and students have in producing such small pieces of text - and it is this difficulty that causes us to ask a number of questions about what is going on here at the site of constructing the abstract. The difficulty emerges, we would argue, primarily because of the identity work involved.

Graduated doctoral students know how to summarise and locate in relation to other research and they are competent writers- so it's not about the absence of these skills. They also know how to argue, because a thesis is, after all, an argument that has been carefully made and substantiated across 300 odd pages of crafted text. What they are not comfortable with or accomplished at, it seems, is definitive assertion. The PhD encourages a kind of careful argumentation which always has successful assessment by examiners as its goal - and the identity work accomplished may be to shape overly cautious, sometimes highly anxious scholar identities - with less confidence than they may have begun with.

Where to next?

We have suggested in this paper that abstracts are increasingly important because they are the means through which academics bid for inclusion in conferences, and for attention in journals and global citation indices. We have suggested that the art of writing abstracts is neglected in the academy, is given scant attention by journal editors and has produced a motley and often bland array of conventions and genres. We have also argued that there is benefit in being more systematic about supporting postgraduate and newly qualified researchers in writing abstracts.

While we do have some ideas about what is helpful in scaffolding conversations and workshops that support abstract writing (see Appendix), this is only a small beginning in thinking about the myriad of complex writing practices associated with research. We emphasise that we are talking about writing practices here, and not just skills - and that advice and tips will not suffice as the genre we offer postgraduate students. Research writing involves a sophisticated set of social practices with sets of conventions and textual characteristics. Furthermore, as we have argued here, such written work is made complex at least in part because scholarly writing is the major site for claiming authority, identity, and making reputation. We therefore continue to ask ourselves - What is the pedagogy we need to develop to teach these practices? And how will we differentiate the different kinds of writing that are involved in what we call research writing? We fear that until the notion of writing as integral to academic work is taken seriously, it will stay on the margins of the practices of supervision.

Of course, in saying this in a conference paper which we do intend eventually to polish and publish, and in staking our claim to some of this territory, we are active participants in the same arcade game as our students. We too are entangled in this scholarly writing practice in multiple ways and are not simply practitioner researchers of supervision pedagogies. As Benjamin noted,

> The flaneur, the intelligentsia came into the marketplace. As they thought, to observe it - but in

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reality it was already to find a buyer.

References

Appendix

Here are some of the questions we've developed to encourage writers to engage with the text work and identity work involved in writing an abstract

Genre Questions

- What's the research problem/context being addressed? How do I locate the significance of my work?
- What conversation am I in? Where am I standing to research this problem?
- What do I offer as an alternative? What is my argument?

Representation Questions

- How do I represent myself as researcher? (I, we, passive, the paper)
- How much reference do I make to the research method/methodology and in what way?
- How much reference do I make to the doctoral or masters thesis

Criteria Questions

- **Attitude**

If abstract are bids for seduction (read me), what evidence can we see of attitude - of promotion the work being done

- **Location**

Given that researchers do not work alone and are part of a larger global research community - where conversations and debates within and across disciplines and fields is the norm - what evidence is there of location in these bids for inclusion and conversation

- **Argument**

To what extent are these abstracts arguments rather than summaries - Is the argument made explicit, is the word argue used at all? What other words substitute for argue and with what effect.

- **Sentence length**

Is there a common number of sentences in relation to a set of rhetorical moves?

- **Researcher representation**

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Is I we, absent, or passive altogether and predominantly the paper or the article?

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